

## **The Seventh of November** by **MilevenIsEndGame**

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**Summary:** Jim Hopper would never teach his daughter how to ride a bike or drive a car. He'd never see her graduate from high school or give her away on her wedding day. He'd never have grandchildren. Because Jim Hopper's daughter was stolen from him. The culprit? Cancer. But everything changed once El came into his life. Little by little, she gave him back everything he'd lost.

## The Seventh of November

This is a day Jim Hopper never thought he would see. This is a day that he would sometimes think about, and what could have been, and how it would simply never be. It was a day, like so many others, that was stolen from him. Just like *she* was stolen from him.

He would never teach her how to ride a bike without training wheels, or to drive a car. He wouldn't get to see her off to her first date or her high school prom. (Nor would he experience the great amusement of watching whatever pesky teenage boy squirm as he arrived to pick her up, finding her police officer dad sitting quite comfortably at the Hopper dining table while polishing his guns.) He wouldn't get to see her walk across the stage on graduation day to receive her high school diploma. Nor college. He would never walk her down the aisle on her wedding day to give her away to a man she grew up to love almost more than anyone. (*But never more than she loved him. That wasn't possible.*) Except he wished it *was* possible.

But it wasn't.

Jim Hopper would never see his daughter do any of those things because she was stolen from him. A black hole called cancer took her life away at the tender and innocent age of just seven. It had broken him to his core, and there were days where he had nearly given up himself, days where he wished he'd have gone with her. But life had other plans for Jim Hopper.

It all started on November 7, 1983, when a frantic, chain smoking Joyce Byers showed up in his office at the Hawkins Police Station. Her 12 year old son, Will, had gone missing; he'd never come home the night before. Jim didn't take it so seriously at first; boys will be boys, and Jim was sure he'd turn up eventually. Except he didn't.

*No. Not again. Not another kid.*

Once upon a time back in their high school days, Jim and Joyce were very close. Life happened and they drifted apart throughout the years; they both grew up, got married, had children, divorced.

But if Jim knew anything about Joyce Byers, he knew she was a good person, and a damn good mother; a fierce, protective mother. And now her son was missing. Jim lost his little girl, and he was not about to sit back and watch Joyce lose her boy.

*Not Joyce.*

Jim would not rest until he found Will Byers safe and well, because he would be damned if another kid died on his watch. Not again.

Little did he know his life was about to change forever.

And that change came in the form of a little girl called Eleven. A little girl that Will's little friends had found and rescued in the woods while they snuck out to search for him. A little girl with telekinetic powers who saved all their asses and helped them find Will once and for all. A little girl who needed to be saved herself. A little girl who needed a father. A *real* father.

And it just so happened, Jim Hopper needed a daughter.

El changed everything. She gave him a purpose. She gave him a reason to smile again. And little by little, she gave him back all those days he never thought he'd see.

He was there for El's first day of high school. *Her first day of school ever.* He was there to see her off before every school dance, and much to his own surprise, he behaved himself and always kept his guns away. He beamed with pride and cried tears of joy when she walked across the stage at Hawkins High School and received the diploma that she earned through sweat, blood, and tears. And once more just four short years later when she earned her college degree.

And El was there for him, too. A few short months after she started school, she was there to help Jim get ready for his first official date with Joyce. She was there again along with Will and his older brother Jonathan when Jim and Joyce sat them all around a dinner table and announced their impending marriage. She was standing at the altar on their wedding day, joyful tears streaming down her face and tempting to ruin her carefully done make-up as the Byers and Hopper families became one. Jim attributed all of his newfound happiness to

El; it all began with her. She would never replace the little girl Jim lost, but she certainly filled a void in Jim's heart; she took that hole and filled it with love, laughter, pride and happiness.

When El came into Jim's life, she was already a packaged deal with Michael Wheeler, one of Will Byers' friends who found her in the woods that night back on November 7, 1983. It was Mike who'd taken her home and hid her in his basement for a week, Mike who'd clothed and fed her, Mike who protected her, Mike who'd given her a proper name.

*"Well, my name's Mike. Short for Michael. Maybe we can call you El? Short for Eleven?"*

And from then on out, she was El. *Mike's El*. She was his before she was ever Jim's, and although he'd never admit it when the kids were younger, especially in the years of raging teenage hormones, Jim was eternally grateful to Mike for saving the cold, scared little girl in the woods in 1983 and bringing her into his life.

*It was early in the morning before dawn at the Byers-Hopper house. The kids were all home for Christmas break from their junior year of college. El was still in bed, but Mike couldn't sleep. Instead, he ended up downstairs at the kitchen table having coffee with Jim.*

*"Listen, when you're ready to propose, don't come asking for my permission. That choice is hers. But we both know she's going to say yes. So just do me a favor, will ya? Let me know before you're going to do it, yeah?"*

*The kid went wide-eyed and choked on the coffee he was sipping, but smiled as he cleared his throat and quickly recovered.*

*"Yeah... Yeah, Hop, of course. I promise."*

And as expected, the kid was true to his word.

The fall after they graduated college, Jim Hopper walked down the aisle with his little girl, his beautiful, strong, brave little girl, the little girl who quite literally gave him his life back after so much loss and pain, and he happily gave her hand to the boy, *no*, to the young man

who made it all possible. Jane Eleanor Hopper, *her legal name after the forged adoption*, became Jane Eleanor Wheeler, Mrs. Michael Theodore Wheeler, or if you asked her, just El. El Wheeler.

Jim couldn't have been more proud.

Until now.

It was November again, many years after the events of 1983.

With his beautiful wife by his side, her dainty little hand held in his large gruff one, they walked down the long sterile hallway until they reached their destination. "Room 315. This is it!" Joyce said as she beamed up at him.

Jim took a deep breath and attempted to rub the sleep from his eyes; it had been a long drive from Hawkins.

"Are you ready?" asked Joyce, her pretty brown eyes full of encouragement and understanding, just as always.

"Yeah," Jim smiled down at her, giving her hand an affectionate squeeze. "I'm ready."

Joyce grinned and tapped on the door in front of them. A few short moments later, it opened to reveal a tall lanky young man with a mop full of dark hair on the other side. "Mike, sweetie!" Joyce exclaimed as she wrapped her son-in-law up in a warm embrace.

"Hey, Joyce!" he squeezed back, and nodded to Jim, "Hey Hop! Thanks for coming, guys."

"Are you kidding?" Jim snorted. "Where else would we be?"

Mike didn't say anything back as Joyce released him, but the huge grin on his face and the hint of a twinkle in his eyes told Jim everything he needed to know. *He knew that look*. He knew it *very* well. He had seen it reflecting back at him for many years now.

"C'mere, kid," Jim said as he pulled his son-in-law close for a hug himself, seemingly taking the younger man by surprise. But Mike was hugging him back automatically, and when the two men separated,

Mike said, "Come on, guys. There's someone who would love to meet you."

Jim and Joyce followed Mike through the door where they found El sitting up in a hospital bed, cradling a soft yellow bundle close to her chest. The most beautiful dimpled smile stretched across her face as she beamed up at the three of them. Her skin was absolutely radiant and glowing. She looked like the epitome of happiness. "Hi, Dad. Hi, Mom," she cooed to them.

"Hey, kid," Jim said softly, smiling so big his face was hurting. "You look so good, honey. So happy."

"I am," she said, still smiling. Then she looked over at Mike who had joined her and was now sitting on the edge of her hospital bed. "We all are."

Jim watched as Mike placed a sweet kiss to his daughter's temple, and in the next instant, they were both staring down in awe at the tiny yellow bundle still cradled up against El's chest. *It moved!* And in that moment, both Jim and Joyce released matching audible gasps, Jim squeezing his wife's hand, Joyce placing her free hand over jaw-dropped mouth.

El and Mike looked up at them.

"Would you like to hold her?" El asked sweetly.

Jim couldn't find his voice, but good thing for him, Joyce always knew just what to say.

"We would love to, sweetie," Joyce cooed to her daughter before looking over to her husband. "But please, Dad first."

"Come on Grandpa, get over here," called Mike, making both El and Joyce erupt in quiet giggles.

Jim rolled his eyes, but he could feel the smile curling onto his lips in spite of himself.

*Grandpa. That was going to take some getting used to.*

Jim and Joyce made their way over to the two chairs that were directly next to El's bed. "Are you ready to meet Grandpa and Grandma Hopper, little one?" El softly cooed to the sweet little bundle cradled in her arms. And then she gave the tiny bundle to Mike who pressed a gentle kiss atop her little head before placing her in Jim's arms. "This is your Grandpa," he cooed to his baby girl.

Mike joined El once more, sitting on the edge of her bed, both of them smiling brightly as they watched their daughter being held by her grandfather for the very first time.

Joyce was sitting right next to him, their knees touching due to the close proximity. She leaned over Jim's shoulder to gaze down at the baby girl, both of them absolutely mesmerized by her and taking her all in.

She had El's cute little button nose and a head full of silky soft hair almost as dark as Mike's. She had El's eyes, too. Bright eyes that were looking right up at him. And Jim Hopper was done for. "Alright. You got me. I'm wrapped around your little finger already, little girl."

Mike and El shared a chuckle.

"Just like her Mommy," Joyce added.

"Always," Jim said as he looked over at El and caught her eye, the smile she gave him in return absolutely radiating with happiness and admiration.

"She's so beautiful," Jim said, looking down at the baby girl and then back up to her parents. "You guys did good."

El turned to Mike. "We did, didn't we?" she asked him as a playful grin danced upon her lips.

"Yeah, we did," Mike replied and rubbed his nose against hers in a sweet Eskimo kiss.

"So," said Joyce, still fawning over the little one nuzzled in her husband's arms, "does this beautiful baby girl have a name?"

"Yeah," Jim added. "Are you finally ready to tell us this top secret

name so that I have something to call my granddaughter?"

"Oh, please!" El chortled. "You're just going to call her, 'hey, kid' for the rest of her life anyway."

Mike nodded in agreement with his wife, shit-eating grin and all.

"Yeah, yeah," Jim said with a roll of his eyes. "Let's hear it!" And after a beat, he cooed to his new granddaughter, "What did Mommy and Daddy saddle you with, huh?"

"Jim!" Joyce reprimanded, "I'm sure it's a lovely name."

*And boy, was she right.*

Jim gave his wife a wink before focusing his attention on his daughter and son-in-law across from him.

The new parents were smiling at each other, sharing all knowing looks. They've known her name since the very beginning, but they never told another living soul aside from each other. Not even Will or the rest of those kids they referred to as "The Party" while growing up.

*"It's a surprise!" El had told him at the gender reveal party Karen Wheeler had insisted on throwing for them over the summer. "You'll like it. I promise."*

And if there was one thing El always did, she kept her promises.

*Thank you very much, Mike Wheeler.*

"Dad," El interrupted his train of thought, "We'd like to officially introduce you to your granddaughter." She looked over at Joyce. "Mom, you too."

She paused and glanced over at Mike beside her, all bright smiles and love and happiness written all over both of their faces before she spoke again.

"We're so excited for Sara Teresa Wheeler to finally meet her grandparents."



Jim's eyes grew wide and he felt his breath hitch. His throat closed up and he couldn't remember how to speak. Before he knew it, there were silent tears running down both of his cheeks. El's eyes were glistening, too, as well as Mike's and Joyce's. There was not a dry eye in the room aside from the ones belonging to the sweet precious baby girl that had now fallen asleep in his arms.

"S... S... Sara?"

"Yes," El nodded, a single tear escaping from her eye and running down her cheek. "Sara for the daughter that was taken from you, and Teresa for the mother who never even got to hold me." El let out a light breathy sob, but still managed to smile. Mike immediately wrapped his arms around her and placed a kiss to the top of her head for comfort.

"Do you like it?" she asked, still head tightly in Mike's embrace, her big brown doe eyes glistening, full of hope and seeking approval.

Did he like it? Jim more than liked it, and he had just been reduced to an absolutely trashy puddle of emotions.

"I'm so honored," he said, smiling through his tears. "I love it. And I love *you*," he said to El, before looking over to Mike, "I love ALL of you, and I'm so proud. Look what you did!" He lowered his gaze to the little sleeping beauty cradled safely in his arms. "You made me a Grandpa," he whispered, eyes still on Sara.

"We did," El said to Mike who ghosted the faintest of blushes on his pale cheeks before pressing his forehead against El's and smiling at her lovingly.

Jim ever so gently handed Sara over to Joyce, kissing both of *his* girls on their foreheads before going to El and Mike and wrapping his arms around them both.

"Thank you so much. This is the happiest, proudest day of my life."

And it was. It really, truly was.